

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 01432 01 OF 02 241417Z

47

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 RSC-01 EB-03 /038 W
----- 025427

R 241146Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 171

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 1432

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS 2

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, TH

SUBJECT: SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY LEADER THAWIT KLINPRATHUM

REF: BANGKOK 1303 (SECRET - LIMDIS)

BEGIN SUMMARY: WEALTHY TRUCKING TYCOON THAWIT KLINPRATHUM WANTS TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER; AT A MINIMUM HE WOULD LIKE TO SERVE IN THE NEXT CABINET. PUNDITS PREDICT HIS SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY WILL DO WELL ON JANUARY 26, AND HE APPEARS TO HAVE A BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE OF ACHIEVING AT LEAST ONE OF HIS GOALS. AN INTELLECTUAL LIGHTWEIGHT AND A NOUVEAU RICHE CIVILIAN WHO SITS ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE THAI BUSINESS WORLD, HE OFFERS LITTLE ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL COMPETITION FOR KRIT WITHIN IMPORTANT MILITARY AND FINANCIAL CIRCLES. HE HAS, AT LEAST PARTIALLY, SHIFTED HIS LOYALTIES FROM RETIRED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP TO KRIT. THAWIT WOULD BE A WEAK PRIME MINISTER, AND KRIT WOULD HAVE LITTLE TROUBLE MANIPULATING HIM FROM BEHIND THE SCENES. AT HIS MILITARY RETIREMENT IN OCTOBER 1975, KRIT COULD, IF HE CHOSE TO DO SO, STEP INTO THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND LOOK GOOD BY COMPARISON. HAVING FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES AND BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME MADE THAWIT WEALTHY. IN THE SAME MANNER HE MAY BECOME THAILAND'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER. WHETHER KRIT WOULD ALLOW SUCH A LIGHTWEIGHT TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER IS PROBLEMATIC. END.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 01432 01 OF 02 241417Z

SUMMARY.

A. THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY

1. THAWIT WAS IN NOVEMBER 1973 THE FIRST THAI POLITICIAN TO FORMALLY ANNOUNCE HIS INTENTION TO FORM A POLITICAL PARTY FOR THE 26 JANUARY 1975 ELECTIONS; HE ESTABLISHED THE FREE NATION (SERI RATH) PARTY (FNP), MADE UP LARGELY OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE PRO- GOVERNMENT UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP) LIKE HIMSELF. MISSION CONTACTS REPORTED AT THE TIME THAT THAWIT, FNP'S NOMINAL HEAD, WAS EITHER ACTING AS A FRONT MAN FOR HIS CLOSE PERSONAL, FINANCIAL, AND POLITICAL ASSOCIATE, FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER AIR CHIEF MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP, OR HOPED TO PERSUADE THAWI TO ACCEPT THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP. THAWIT'S RELATIVELY LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES PREVENTED THE FORMATION OF A FULL-FLEDGED POLITICAL GROUP UNDER THE FNP BANNER. HE COMBINED HIS PARTY WITH THREE SMALLER ONES IN SEPTEMBER 1974 TO FORM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE (THAMMA SANGKHOM) PARTY (SJP), WHICH HE NOW LEADS. THAWI BACKED AWAY FROM ASSOCIATING HIMSELF WITH THE PARTY, APPARENTLY ON KRIT'S ORDERS, AND NEVER PROVIDED HIS PROMISED FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS. THAWIT HAS SUBSEQUENTLY TRIED TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THAWI AND TO CURRY THE FAVOR OF KRIT AND FORMER POLICE DIRECTOR-GENERAL PRASOET RUCHIRAWONG, WHOM HE FEELS CAN HELP HIS PARTY WIN VOTES. THAWIT MEETS WITH KRIT FREQUENTLY AND ON A CORDIAL BASIS. KRIT NOW APPEARS TO HAVE GIVEN STRONG MORAL BACKING TO THE SJP, PROBABLY BECAUSE IT CONTAINS NO RIVALS AND IS FAVORABLE TO THE MILITARY. BOTH KRIT AND PRASOET HAVE PROVIDED FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

2. THAWIT LEADS THE SJP PRIMARILY BECAUSE HE IS WEALTHY AND BECAUSE HE HAS ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL WEALTH. IT IS PARTLY BECAUSE OF MONEY AND THAWIT'S PRESUMED KINDNESS IN DISTRIBUTING IT, AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF KRIT'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE PARTY, THAT MANY MEMBERS JOINED THE SJP. IT IS ALSO BECAUSE OF THAWIT'S MONEY, RATHER THAN WHATEVER RUDIMENTARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY HE MAY PROFESS, THAT THE SJP INCLUDES SUCH A VARIED ASSORTMENT OF POLITICAL PER-

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 01432 01 OF 02 241417Z

SUASIONS. IN A SITUATION WHERE ALL ACTORS DON'T HAVE TO PUBLICLY IDENTIFY THEMSELVES OR THEIR INTERESTS, MANY STRANGE PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOP.

B. THAWIT'S PUPPETEERS - BACKSTAGE ADVISERS AND ASSOCIATES

3. DURING THE CAMPAIGN, THAWIT HAS RELIED HEAVILY ON DEPUTY PARTY LEADER DR. NIPHON SASITHON, FORMER DEAN OF

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE FACULTY AT CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, FOR IN DEPTH THINKING ON CAMPAIGN IDEAS AND STRATEGY. NIPHON HAS TAUGHT THAWIT MUCH OF WHAT HE KNOWS ABOUT POLITICAL STYLE BUT HAS HAD TO COVER UP FOR THAWIT'S POLITICAL FAUX PAS ON AT LEAST ONE OCCASION. TWO OF THAWIT'S OTHER ADVISERS, AND THE MEN BEHIND HIS THINKING ON POLICY MATTERS, ARE THONG DAORUANG AND SAMAN CHOMPHUTHEP, BOTH YOUNG, FOREIGN-EDUCATED, M.A. DEGREE HOLDERS. SAMAN HAS SOCIALIST LEANINGS AND IS IMPRESSED WITH ISRAEL'S KIBBUTZ SYSTEM. THAWIT'S CLOSEST ADVISER REPORTEDLY IS PATTHOM PHOKAEQ, AN EX- PARLIAMENTARIAN FROM RATHCHABURI AND CABINET MEMBER IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF PHIBUN SONGKHRAM AND THANOM KITTIKACHON. PATHOM HELPED THAWIT ESTABLISH HIS MONEYSMAKING TRANSPORT BUSINESS AND SAW THAT HE GOT ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN 1969. PATHOM IS VERY CLOSE TO FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SUKIT.

4. IN ADDITION TO AIR CHIEF MARSAL THAWI, THAWIT'S ONLY OTHER KNOWN CLOSE CONTACTS AT THE UPPER LEVELS OF THE RTG ARE GENERAL PRACHUAP SUNTHARANGKUN, THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF POLICE, WHOM HE KNOWS FROM THE DAYS WHEN PRACHUAP WAS DIRECTOR FOR THE PORT AUTHORITY OF THAILAND AND THAWIT WAS STARTING HIS TRANSPORT BUSINESS; AND POLICE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL, LT. GEN. WITHUN YASAWAT. BOTH POLICE OFFICERS HAVE FAIRLY GOOD ACCESS TO GENERAL KRIT OR HIS STAFF.

C. ATTITUDES AND CAPABILITIES

5. IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND APPEARANCES, THAWIT STRIVES TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF AN IDEALISTIC, PRINCIPLED MAN WHO HAS ENTERED POLITICS TO SERVE THAILAND AND ITS PEOPLE, RATHER THAN FOR PERSONAL GAIN. ANTI-CORRUPTION MUCKRAKERS, HOWEVER, HAVE COME DOWN HARD ON
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 01432 01 OF 02 241417Z

THAWIT FOR HIS ALLEGEDLY CORRUPT AND ILLEGAL BUSINESS ACTIVITIES. WHILE WE CAN FAIRLY RELIABLY SUBSTANTIATE ONLY ONE OF THEIR CHARGES, TO WIT THAT THAWIT CHEATED THE EXPRESS TRANSPORT ORGANIZATION (ETO) OUT OF LARGE SUMS, WE RECALL THAT HE ONCE SPELLED OUT TO US THE "CARDINAL RULE" OF EVERY PRACTICAL BUSINESSMAN, IN WHOSE COMPANY HE PRESUMABLY FINDS HIMSELF: "MAXIMIZE THE USE OF LOOP-HOLES; IF CAUGHT, FIND THE SLIGHTEST PENALTY."

SECRET

NNN

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 01432 02 OF 02 241350Z

47

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 RSC-01 EB-03 /038 W

----- 025190

R 241146Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0172

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 1432

LIMDIS

6. IT IS THE OPINION OF MOST THAI AND AMERICANS WHO HAVE MET OR HEARD THAWIT THAT, DESPITE A GOOD MEASURE OF ADMINISTRATIVE ABILITY, FINANCIAL EXPERTISE, AND BUSINESS SHREWDNESS, HE IS A POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIGHTWEIGHT, WHO MUST RELY HEAVILY ON HIS ADVISERS LEST HE MAKE A FOOL OF HIMSELF. SEVERAL OF THESE ADVISERS HAVE DIFFICULTY SAYING ANYTHING FAVORABLE ABOUT HIS INTELLIGENCE, EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT HE LEARNS QUICKLY. NOT A GOOD PUBLIC SPEAKER, HE HAS BORED CAMPAIGN AUDIENCES WITH LONG DISJOINTED POLICY STATEMENTS. HIS IDEAS ARE NAIVE AND IMPRACTICAL. LIKE MOST POLITICIANS HERE HE SPEAKS IN VAGUE GENERALITIES ABOUT COMBATTING UNEMPLOYMENT, RAISING WAGES AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING, IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY, AND DISTRIBUTING INCOME MORE EQUITABLY. THAWIT TOLD THE PRESS IN LATE 1974 THAT IF THE SJP HAS CONTROLLING POWER IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, IT WILL INTRODUCE A "WELFARE STATE." HE HAS NOT EXPLAINED FULLY WHAT HE MEANS. WHILE WE DO NOT IMPUGN HIS HONORABLE THOUGHTS, WE WONDER HOW THAWIT, A MEMBER OF THE GET-RICH-QUICK, SPEND-IT-FAST-AND-WILD SCHOOL CAN BE COMMITTED TO THIS GOAL.

D. EARLY LIFE AND CAREER

7. A SELF-MADE MAN, THAWIT WENT FROM RAGS TO RICHES AND IS QUITE PROUD OF HIS HUMBLE BACKGROUND. HE WAS BORN IN BANGKOK ON 9 FEBRUARY 1929. HE HELPED HIS MOTHER,
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 01432 02 OF 02 241350Z

WHO WAS A VEGETABLE HAWKER, AND PEDALED A TRISHAW. HE

ATTENDED A BUSINESS SECONDARY SCHOOL AND EARNED A CERTIFICATE IN ECONOMICS. LATER IN HIS CAREER HE MADE A STUDY TOUR TO JAPAN AND IN 1973 STUDIED ADMINISTRATION AT THE ILLINOIS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE. HE CURRENTLY IS STUDYING FOR A BACHELORS DEGREE IN LAW AT BANGKOK'S RAMKHAMHAENG UNIVERSITY.

8. THAWIT HAS SPENT ALMOST HIS ENTIRE CAREER IN PRIVATE BUSINESS. STARTING OUT AS A BOOKKEEPER, HE WENT A FEW YEARS LATER TO THE NORTHEAST TO WORK WITH A BUS COMPANY AND THEN WITH A TRANSPORT FIRM AS A SHIPPING CLERK. HE MADE SMALL SUMS OF MONEY AND IMPORTANT CONTACTS THROUGH VARIOUS BUSINESS SCHEMES. IN 1964 HE BEGAN A SMALL TRUCKING FIRM WHICH, THANKS TO THE HELP OF INFLUENTIAL POLITICIANS AND DEMANDS WHICH THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE GENERATED, HE HAS BUILT OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS INTO A LARGE, SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE KNOWN AS THE TRAILER TRANSPORT COMPANY.

9. THAWIT WAS THE FIRST TO INTRODUCE LARGE TRAILER RIGS INTO THE COUNTRY. HE MADE HIS FORTUNE BY SUB-CONTRACTING MOST OF THE LARGE TRAILER TRUCKS WHICH THE EXPRESS TRANSPORT ORGANIZATION (ETO) USED IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S TO HAUL GOODS FOR U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN THAILAND. HE PAID THE ETO A FLAT PERCENTAGE OF HIS GROSS RECEIPTS, BUT NEVER REALLY TOLD ETO EXACTLY HOW MUCH HE WAS MAKING. HE APPARENTLY POCKETED MUCH OF THE UNREPORTED INCOME. THAWI CHUNLASAP REPORTEDLY IS THAWIT'S PARTNER IN THE BUSINESS, WHICH MADE OUT PARTICULARLY WELL WHILE THAI SERVED AS MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS DURING 1969-71. THAWIT IN 1970 ESTABLISHED ANOTHER TRANSPORTATION FIRM, THE "T" COMPANY, LTD. HE SERVES AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD. GRATEFUL TO THE ETO FOR SENDING SO MUCH BUSINESS HIS WAY, HE INVITED MRS. CHIRACHIT CHAMRATROMRAN, DAUGHTER OF THEN ETO PRESIDENT, LT. GEN. CHIT SUNTHANON, TO SIT ON THE NEW COMPANY'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

10. THAWIT AND A PUBLISHER FRIEND IN 1969 PURCHASED A NEWSPAPER LICENSE FROM DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUNSATHIAN AND BEGAN PUBLISHING THE "THAI DAILY", A
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 01432 02 OF 02 241350Z

SMALL CIRCULATION, POORLY WRITTEN NEWSPAPER WHICH SUPPORTS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS. IT WAS CLOSELY TIED TO PRAPHAT AND IS NOW TIED TO NARONG KITTIKACHON, WHO REPORTEDLY HAS SENT \$50,000 TO FINANCE THE PAPER SINCE GOING INTO EXILE IN OCTOBER 1973. THAWIT WAS BEHIND A SERIES OF ARTICLES CRITICAL OF HIS COMPETITOR, THE SEALAND CORPORATION, A U.S. FIRM ON CONTRACT TO THE U.S. MILITARY, WHICH ATTEMPTED IN 1971 TO IMPORT TRAILER BOTTOMS DUTY

FREE. THE INCIDENT CREATED A MESSY PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEM FOR THE MISSION FOR AWHILE.

E. POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

11. THAWIT, WHO HAD HAD LITTLE OR NO POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, HELPED FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHON ORGANIZE THE UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP) IN 1968. HE WAS THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. HE WAS ELECTED TO THE PARLIAMENT FROM RATCHABURI PROVINCE IN 1969 AND WAS PART OF A GROUP OF UTPP MEMBERS WHO WERE LOYAL TO THAWI. HIS BAG MAN FOR PURCHASING VOTES IN PARLIAMENT WAS CHAN CHARINTON, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HIS TRAILER TRANSPORT COMPANY. THAWIT CLAIMS TO HAVE DONATED HIS \$300 MONTHLY PARLIAMENTARY SALARY, PLUS UNSPECIFIED AMOUNTS FROM HIS PERSONAL FORTUNE, TO CHARITIES IN RATCHARBURI. AS AN MP HE VISITED THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE IN 1969. THAWIT SERVED IN THE 1973-75 NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, WHERE HE LED A GROUP OF FORMER UTPP MEMBERS.

F. PERSONAL DATA

12. THAWIT IS FRIENDLY AND PLEASANT WITH AMERICANS. HE HAS HAD THREE WIVES. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT KNOWN WHETHER HE EVER OFFICIALLY MARRIED THE FIRST TWO, THEY BORE HIM THREE CHILDREN. THIPPHAWAN, ONE OF THE FIRST TWO WIVES, SUED THAWIT ABOUT 1971 FOR 10 PERCENT OF THE SHARES OF HIS TRAILER TRANSPORT COMPANY. HE MARRIED HIS PRESENT, VERY PRETTY WIFE, AROM, SOMETIME AFTER 1969, AND THEY HAVE ONE CHILD.

13. THAWIT SPENDS MONEY LAVISHLY ON EXPENSIVE HOUSES AND CARS. HE CLAIMS HIS TWO HOUSES ARE WORTH A TOTAL OF
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 01432 02 OF 02 241350Z

\$1.75 MILLION. HIS DRIVER CARRIES A PISTOL AT ALL TIMES FOR THAWIT'S PROTECTION. THAWIT PLAYS GOLF. HE SPEAKS FAIR ENGLISH.

IMPLICATIONS FOR US INTERESTS

14. THAWIT'S ACCESSION TO THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP WOULD NOT PREJUDICE US INTERESTS HERE. THAWIT MIGHT BE UNPREDICTABLE AT TIMES AND HE CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE ABOVE EMBARRASSING US AS HE HAS IN THE PAST. WE WOULD, HOWEVER, HAVE LITTLE TROUBLE WORKING WITH HIM, PARTICULARLY TO THE EXTENT THAT HE WILL BE A SERVANT OF GENERAL KRIT. UNDER A THAWIT GOVERNMENT, WE WOULD, IN FACT, EXPECT TO DEAL QUITE CLOSELY AND FREQUENTLY WITH KRIT, WHO REMAINS A FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES.

KINTNER

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRIME MINISTER, BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, ELECTION CANDIDATES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO001432
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750027-0439
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750124/aaaaavdl.tel
Line Count: 332
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 75 BANGKOK 1303, 75 (SECRET -
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 JUL 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY LEADER THAWIT KLINPRATHUM
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, TH, (THAWIT KLINPRATHUM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006